



Revised

LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S OFFICE,
ST JAMES'S PALACE, S.W.1.

6th February, 1951.

Dear Lord Chancellor.

I am under heavy pressure from some shades of public opinion to lift the ban upon plays in which reference to homosexuality and Lesbianism occur.

As you may be aware, reference to these two perversions has hitherto been taboo. I have as few hard-and-fast rules as possible and try to judge every play on its merits but neither I nor my predecessor have allowed these subjects. The main reason given for lifting the ban is that the general public is much more outspoken and broadminded than it was and that to ventilate vice and its tragedies would be to the general social advantage. Further, that the theatre is the mirror of the age and that any fettering of modern playwrights is a bad thing.

I am, however, advised from other quarters that the ban on this type of play should be retained, the argument being that the subject will be very distasteful and embarrassing in mixed company of all ages and also that the introduction in plays of these new vices might start an unfortunate train of thought in the previously innocent.

Another view is that the British public is apt to be intolerant of attempts at moral reform and there may be an inclination to ridicule, which would be unfortunate. I can ensure that the subject is not treated with levity in stage plays but I do not control music-hall artistes, who might tend to give the subject distasteful notoriety.

Moreover, if these subjects were allowed, they would open up a new field for playwrights and a considerable number of plays of this type might be expected. This will make my already difficult task

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harder because I shall have to differentiate between those plays that treat the matter with sincerity and those that are written for sensationalism; but this is my problem and should not affect the principle of the matter.

Before making my decision on this important matter, I am anxious to obtain the views of some wise and responsible men and women, representing a cross-section of the play-going public. I know you are very busy but it would be a great help to me if you could give me briefly and in confidence the answer to the following question:

In your view, am I any longer justified in withholding permission for these two subjects to be mentioned on the stage?

There is a certain urgency about the matter, as a play on the subject of Lesbianism is under immediate decision.

Yours sincerely,
Chamberlain

The Lord Chancellor.

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